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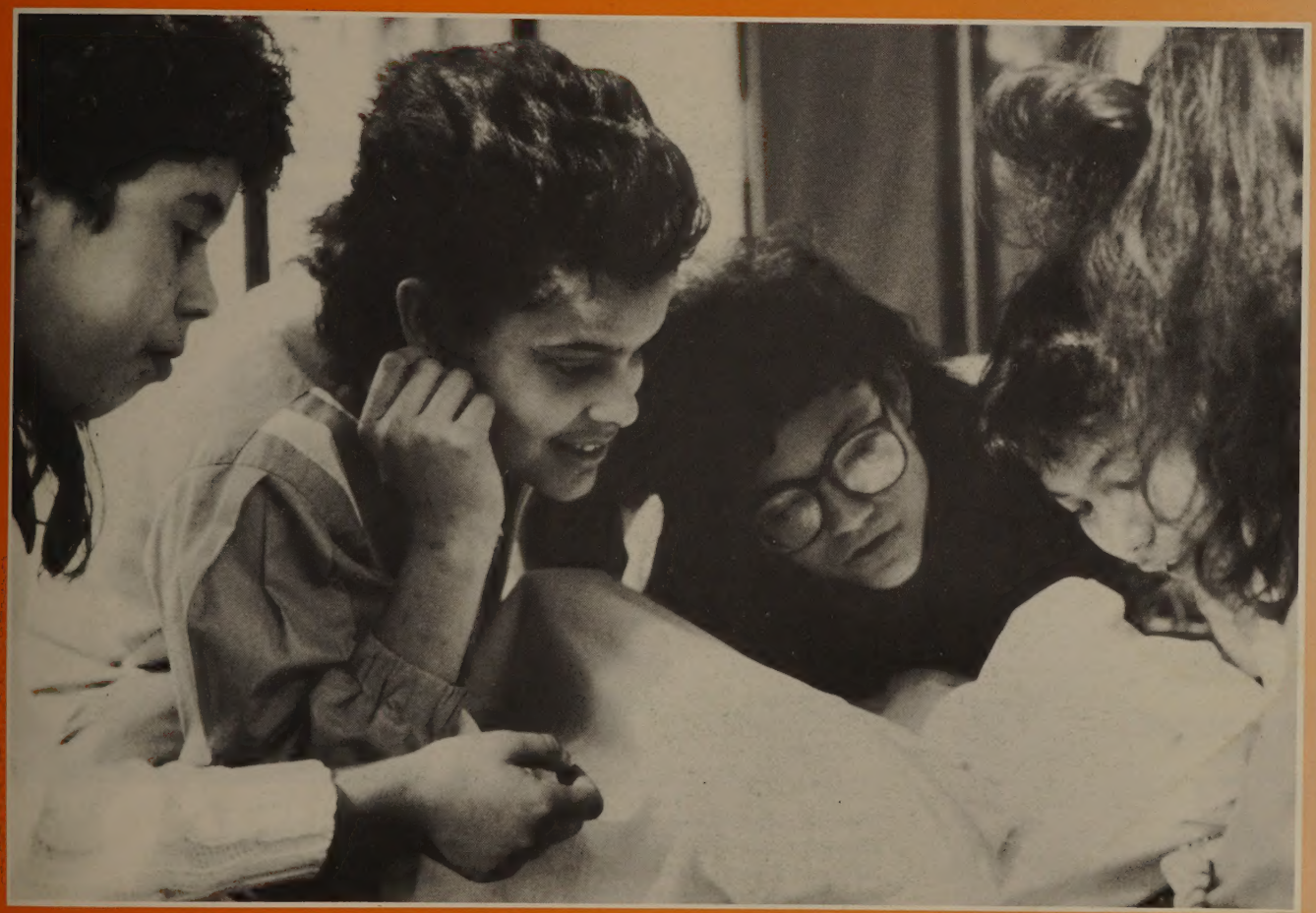

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our children our challenge

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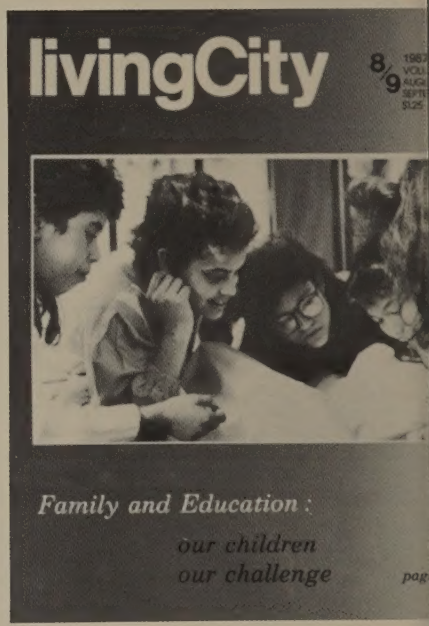

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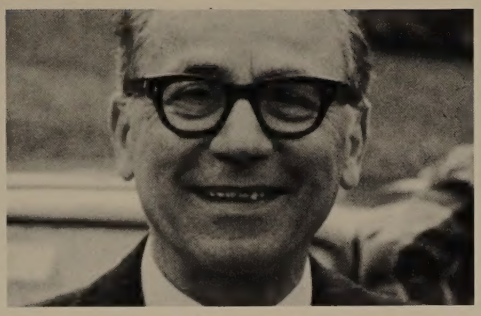
THE FAMILY AND EDUCATION: Part II of our coverage of the International Congress organized by the New Family Movement of the Focolare.



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"The Madonna of the Cushion," glazed terracotta by Andrea della Robbia (1435-1525).

Mary and the Marian Year

Citta Nuova magazine directed questions to Chiara Lubich on the topic of how to live this important ecclesial event.

The Marian Year has begun. If we look to the recent past for anything of the kind we see that there was a Marian Holy Year in 1954 designated by Pope Pius XII to celebrate the centenial of the proclamation of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. For the fiftieth anniversary of that proclamation, Pope Pius X had called for a jubilee of several months duration.

Differently however from these and other Marian events, this Marian Year is neither a Holy Year nor a Jubilee. It is instead, as the Pope has pointed out, a year in which every diocese will find different ways to celebrate and take a deep look into the mystery of Mary and thereby foster ways to honor her.

The Marian Year began on June 7th, Pentecost Sunday to underscore the fact that the Mother of Christ was present at the very beginning of the Church, awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit, assiduously praying among the apostles and disciples. She "preceded" the Church in its journey through the history of humanity. The Marian Year will conclude on the feast of the Assumption of Mary into heaven, a title under which she is contemplated as a "sign of pure hope and consolation for the pilgrim people of God."

What is the meaning and purpose of the Marian Year? There is an underlying meaning to keep in mind which has a primary Christological and ecclesial purpose: to prepare the Church and through the Church the whole world for the third millenium of Christianity as the 2,000th year since the birth of the Savior approaches. Natural

ly there are also reasons which specifically have to do with Mary: in God's plan of salvation, Mary's birth and journey of faith preceded the birth of Christ.

Furthermore, the recent encyclical dedicated to Mary emphasizes a fact of ecumenical significance. 1988 marks the 1,000th anniversary of the baptism of Saint Vladimir and 1987 the 1,200th anniversary of the Second Council of Nicaea, which was the last worldwide ecumenical council before the schism separating the Greek and Latin Churches. For these reasons the Marian Year is being celebrated between 1987 and 1988.

Lastly we can look to the pastoral aspect of the Marian Year for its meaning and purpose. In the intention of the Holy Father, reflection and prayer should not end with the commemoration of an event which took place some 2,000 years ago but rather promote a more intense journey of faith in the Church and the world.

It was the Holy Father's hope that this year would stimulate clergy and laity to grow in their knowledge of the presence of Mary and her mission in the mystery of salvation of Christ and the Church without overlooking the cultural context of our time. □

Question: How did you react to the announcement of the Marian Year?

Answer: The news gave me great joy for the simple reason that I love Mary. To have an opportunity to live more intensely with the Virgin, because people will speak more about her, because I will go to visit her shrines, I will pray to her more, often fills my heart with a sense of the divine.

Question: Do you have any suggestions on how to live this Marian Year well?

Answer: I think we should take advantage as much as we can of all the Church will offer during this year to increase our knowledge and devotion to Mary.

It would be well to deeply meditate on the encyclical of the Holy Father, *Mother of the Redeemer* and other Church documents on Mary like, for example, the eighth chapter of *Lumen Gentium* from the Second Vatican Council and the encyclicals of Pope Paul VI.

It would be helpful when possible to attend conferences, debates, watch TV programs, and read on the subject. It will naturally follow to celebrate Mary's feast days, visit basilicas, shrines and churches dedicated to her.

The various movements and associations will naturally emphasize what the Holy Spirit has led them to understand in order to deepen their knowledge and have a greater love for her.

Question: Is it possible to achieve a certain relationship of soul with Mary? What could help deepen it?

Answer: There have been many persons in every age who have attained this goal. I couldn't tell you, however, exactly how they

did it or at what point of their spiritual journey they achieved it.

I will answer your question, therefore by referring to the experience of the Focolare Movement and the way of unity that its members travel.

They don't immediately or even quickly arrive at union with Mary when they start out along this path. It is normal for them to first experience a union—even a deep union —with the Father, with Jesus and with the Holy Spirit. Only later on, with the passing of time, are they aware of a certain union with Mary.

One has the impression in fact, that just as at the beginning of the history of the Church, Mary let herself be eclipsed in order to make way for Jesus, the Son of God, who came on earth as a gift of the Father for our salvation, she continues to do the same now in the life of every person.

Many members of the Movement in fact, affirm that while being committed even for years to the service of God they do not feel a particular relationship with Mary. They venerate her for what she is, they follow her as the most perfect disciple of Christ, they love her ... but, for example, they have not as yet found a spontaneous relationship with her.

It takes time, in fact, to reach this point.

What can hasten a deeply felt union with Mary is that we live as true followers of Jesus, as people who embrace with love all the crosses that present themselves during the day.

By means of this attitude toward suffering, all the virtues take root in a person: patience, humility, obedience, perseverance, love and this makes us more similar to Mary each day, to her whom we know eminently possessed all the virtues.

Also this resemblance to Mary, which can gradually become always more perfect, will make our communion with her grow.

Question: The Marian Year encourages us to imitate Mary. What other idea would you suggest in order to do this always more perfectly?

Answer: Essentially, Mary is the Mother. She is the mother of Jesus and our spiritual mother. From the cross, Jesus gave her to us through the person of John.

Mary is our mother and the mother of all people, of everyone. As the Redemption of Jesus was universal so also is the maternity of Mary for all people.

She loves not only Catholics, but all Christians. She loves Jews, Moslems, Buddhists, Hindus ... people of good will and all the others. Her love certainly goes unreturned by many but she loves them just the same.

To imitate Mary, then, we must make her heart our own and love as and whom she does. Love everyone.

We must relate to every neighbor we meet, or for whom we work, as if we were his or her mother or father. In this way our attitude toward each neighbor will be as perfect as possible.

A mother always welcomes her child, gives encouragement, always hopes and thinks her child is capable of good even if a delinquent, a terrorist, a person ostracized in some way by society. A mother is able to go beyond a child's mistakes, forgive and bear with them.

We can find therefore, in a mother's heart a love which is similar to the love of Christ.

It will be this kind of behavior that—with the grace of God—will result in many conversions to him first of all in ourselves and then in our neighbors. Yes, this is so because even the desert blossoms where Mary passes. □

ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH NEWS

ARCIC II AND THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

The Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission has completed an important document on the Church and salvation. The commission's work involved studying the question of justification which was central to the Protestant Reformation controversy in the sixteenth century in Germany.

The document concluded that in the Christian doctrine of salvation there are not "remaining differences ... (which) can justify our continuing separation. We believe that our two communions are agreed on the essential aspects of the doctrine of salvation, and on the Church's role within it."

Like other documents of this kind, the commission statement is subject to ratification by both Churches. □

THE DIALOGUE WITH THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

One of the foremost topics in the official theological dialogue which the Catholic Church has been carrying on with the Disciples of Christ since 1977 is that of unity and the unity of the Church. This is due in part to the fact that the "Disciples" were started in the United States in the early 1800's as a movement of Christian unity ►

A scene of ecumenical importance during the Pope's visit to Augsburg, Germany. Praying together with the Pope are Cardinal Hoeffner of Cologne, Lutheran Bishop Martin Kruse, and Orthodox Metropolitan Agostinos Lambardakis.

with the intention of overcoming the historical divisions transplanted to North America from Europe and the British Isles.

With a membership of over one million, the "Disciples" today occupy the tenth place among principal Protestant Churches in the United States.

They derive from the unification of two movements: the "Christians" who were followers of Barton Stone in Kentucky, and the "Disciples" who followed Thomas Alexander Campbell in Pennsylvania. Their characteristics: they meet weekly for the Eucharist and their concept of the Church is as described in the Acts of the Apostles.

Since 1977, the Commission for the dialogue between Catholics and the "Disciples of Christ" has held nine meetings in Europe and the United States. The general theme, in the period from 1977 to 1981 was "Apostolicity and Catholicity in the visible unity of the Church," and from 1983 to 1989 is and will be "The Church as Koinonia in Christ." In this context the next meeting, planned for December 1987, will deal with the topic of the continuity of the Church in the apostolic tradition. Last April the "Disciples" also initiated a dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church. □

CANADA: AN EXAMPLE OF INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Canada is among the countries which have done the most to develop structures for inter-religious dialogue.

Several years ago, The National Tripartite Liaison Committee was created which is composed of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB), the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC), and the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) for the purpose of promoting Christian-Jewish dialogue.

More recently a new committee has been founded, along the same pattern, for a Christian-Moslem dialogue. a part of this committee, the Canadian Moslem Congress (CMC) represents the Moslem residents of Canada since it comprises all the Islamic organizations in the country. The dialogue has therefore a solid organizational base and strong support, as it is promoted by the official representative bodies of the three religious communities: Catholics, Protestants, and Moslems.

The Canadian Moslem Congress includes also an Association of Moslem Women who participate in the dialogue with Christian and Jewish women as well.

Canadians are becoming always more aware of the multi-religious reality of their society. Islam—after the migrations from Pakistan, Egypt, and Palestine—is today the most widespread religion in Canada after Christianity. Among those who have immigrated to Canada in the last few years have been Buddhists from Viet Nam and Japan, Hindus and Sikhs from India. In some cities like Vancouver and Toronto inter-religious groups are being formed for the multi-lateral dialogue.

Still in the making are the relationships with the religions of native Americans such as the American Indian and the Eskimos. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops considers it a necessity to promote this dialogue, especially among the native Canadian Christians (who comprise about fifty percent of their population) and those who follow the traditional religions, whose little-known values received coverage at the World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi last November. □

THE FAMILY AND EDUCATION

PART II

The International Family and Education Congress held in Castelgandolfo, Italy on May 2nd and 3rd and organized by the New Family Movement of the Focolare examined today's challenges to education in the light of the Christian ideal. We continue with a schematic presentation of the Conference to enable our readers to participate in some way in this important event.

compiled by Phyllis Scaringe

Chiara Lubich gave the keynote address of the conference. The text of that address "Only One Teacher" was published last month in part I of this article.

Pino Quartana spoke on the socio-cultural context challenging families today in their role as educator.

Today the family is being subjected to an aggression which is unique in its kind in history. The very essence of marriage is being challenged and together with it, its permanence. The speed of technical and social change and the fluctuation of situations, are easily translated into a culture of relativism.

Inner tensions created by the world surrounding the family are heightened by massive advertising which create needs and demands not always compatible with family life.

In our society at large there are always fewer people who want to get married and base their union on deep religious motives. Instead, civil marriages are on the rise as well as various kinds of common-law arrangements which lead to a greater breakdown of family ties.

Up until a few decades ago, at least in the western world, our culture had Judeo-Christian roots. Laws and customs were more or less influenced by them.

In the middle-class family, education had an important place. It reinforced for the most

part the values children received in the home.

The increasing influence of forces from outside the home have shaken both the social context and the family. Today society lacks reference points and is experiencing confusion and insecurity and yet we should consider many changes as being signs of the family's efforts to adapt and preserve its vitality and validity in the face of new demands and different socio-economic situations. The phenomenon we are witnessing does present us with some very positive aspects: the importance of the individual; the movement toward equality between men and women; renewed focus on love as the basic and essential element of the family; many external and formal supports are rightly falling away.

On the part of Christians, we are conscious of a stronger need to understand and to adhere to the sacrament of matrimony. We cannot say that in the past this aspect was always understood and lived in depth. Our times can be the occasion for discovering what is essential, substantial, and specific to matrimony and to the family which is founded on it. All this has immediate effects on the education of children.

Furthermore, today, other forces in society such as government and the media have assumed great influence in the areas of education which were previously the domain of the family. The media operates from a pluralistic frame of reference with respect to several fundamental aspects of the life of the person in the ideological, religious and ethical fields. Thus government and media inform and form our children in ways not always in harmony with our values. Moreover, our children are exposed to the negative influence of television, press, and advertising; and what is worse: pornography, and drugs.

Nevertheless, we who believe in a particular family model are experiencing its vitality, even in the midst of tremendous problems and sufferings. We are discovering its dimensions and riches as we compare it to other models offered us by a society that has cut itself off from the transcendental.

We are beginning to formulate what our educative plan can be. Let's look at the world today with our eyes wide open. We do not want to hide the difficulties but neither do we want to live in fear, preparing nothing but defense plans.

We are here in this congress, to help one another in this endeavor. Chiara told us that even though we are immersed in a secularized society in which traditional values have become less important, other values are emerging. She has invited us to recognize these new and positive elements as signs of the times, in many cases as the deepest needs of humanity implanted by God.

"Jesus must also live among us in our families. This is the presence of Jesus that comes about through unity, wherever two or more are united in his name: Jesus between husband and wife; between mother and son; between father and daughter; between mother and grandfather or aunt...."

Chiara Lubich
"Only One Teacher"

This capacity to recognize the positive and adhere to it will inevitably lead us to Jesus, the Love of the Father made flesh. He is the one who reminds us that not only each one of us, each of our children, each of our families, but all humanity—suffering and scattered as it may be—lives under the loving glance of the Father. ►

The story of humanity is accompanied and supported by this glance. Our first guarantee as educators is precisely this faith which becomes the source of hope for a world whose most serious malady is the absence of this faith.

This key idea, which permits us to look to the future with confidence, is the foundation of our pedagogical endeavor and is a part of a broader project: a society renewed by love. To look at humanity and its history by trying to discern God's view of it, permits us to see the positive that is around us.

It is a matter of getting involved, as a family, of dialoguing directly and without fear with all the other educative agents in society of assuming our responsibility. Concretely speaking, this implies that we take back the place which the different substitutes of the family have tried in vain to make their own.

If the family is declining because it is going through a crisis, we can offer society a family model that is clearly emerging. Precisely because it is engrafted in Christ, founded on a sacrament, nourished by mutual love, is faithful, enduring, and against the trends of the time, it has the strength to present itself as a valid interlocutor with all the other educative agents that society proposes.

Pino Quartana

Thoughts of Igino Giordani on the Family

Igino Giordani, writer, politician and first married focolarino was remembered in the Congress by a presentation of excerpts from a book of his on the family.

as related by Danilo Zanzucchi

We would like to briefly reflect on a selection from the writings of a person to whom we owe very much: Igino Giordani.

As we know, Igino Giordani had a rich personality and the activities he engaged in were manifold.

We knew him as an outstanding international figure of modern Christian thought. We could describe him as the prototype of the lay person.

He was a writer, an expert in the Fathers of the Church, a hagiographer, an apologist, an ecumenist; he was a powerful essayist. He wrote nearly ninety works.

In Italy, Giordani was also among the first to promote the involvement of Catholics in politics. His political career was characterized by clear convictions, firmness without compromise and openness to dialogue with those whose opinions were different from his own.

The presence of Giordani in the Movement has been a great source of inspiration and a stimulus for many decisive developments.

In 1969, Giordani shared his experience as husband and father as he lived it with the spirituality of the Focolare Movement in a book entitled, "Family: Community of Love." It is a small masterpiece, a kind of spiritual testament for the family of today.

The book describes the family for what it is: a community of persons immersed in contradictions and sufferings but which is nurtured by a divine wellspring that puts the highest form of human love, even consecration to God, within the reach of its members. The family can be a "cloister in the world."

Perhaps the meaning behind Giordani's message is this: in the face of the destructive influence which some social elements of society have on the family, the reality of a solid and united family which is a living community of love, will always be the consequence of a

Igino Giordani: his contribution, his presence continues to make itself felt.

choice, a choice which Christians are called to make. This is the vocation of our families, and of many other families in the world.

Now let us read together some excerpts from this book, "Family: Community of Love."

"Once a father and mother have both conferred the sacrament on one another they act as priests and sacramentally begin their royal priesthood, they form a unity that not even the Pope himself could dissolve if for some absurd reason he so desired, because it is a unity sealed by God. It is indissoluble.

"**This means that,** since these two persons have become one body, the salvation of their souls, their entire moral and religious life as well as their material and human life, must be shared. It follows that one cannot legitimately save him or her self without the other. Right from the start their relationship has the potential to bring about the Gospel promises that the more we give, the closer we draw toward sanctity, the more we love, the more we are with Christ. In short, we reach sanctity by forgetting ourselves in order to be instruments for the sanctification of the other.

"This apostolate, so to speak, begins at home, in the family, and when children arrive this apostolate is extended naturally and supernaturally to include them. The children are the concrete realization and living image of the unity between their father and mother.

"The spouses exchange their love and if this love is holy, it becomes an exchange of holiness. This holiness, then, which circulates in the family, is strengthened by each of its members and can extend beyond the family with life-giving energy.

"The family is one of the forms through which the divine is directly communicated to people, through which the love of Christ reaches his Church."

Another thought:

"Through marriage and the family, God has wisely united two of the most important human realities: the mission to transmit life and the mutual and legitimate love between a man and a woman.

"It is therefore life and love: life, which is the love of God for the person; love which is the life of God in the person. Therefore love is not merely a human drive, it is also a divine inspiration: a participation in divine life.

"God is love and he lives in us as love."

Further on, Giordani writes: "If the first note of God is unity, if the first note of the Church is unity, the first note of the family is also unity. Thus the family is in the image and likeness of the Trinity and it lives like a small Church. Unity is the first trait which shows its divine origin.

"If there is love, the children obey their parents and the parents take constant care of their children. ►

From Brooklyn, New York Mary and Tom Hartmann, parents of ten children, shared their experience.

"The Pope cites the well-known sentence of Solomon: "Train a boy in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not swerve from it" (Prov. 22:6).

"In this moment, we sow. In life, we reap. No word reveals to us the greatness, the beauty and the supernatural excellence of the work of Christian education more than the sublime expression of love wherein Jesus, our Lord, identifying himself with chilren, declares: "Whoever welcomes one such child for my sake welcomes me" (Mt. 18:5). We owe children the greatest respect.

"The Greek moralist, Plutarch once said, "The greatest reverence is due a child." For him, a child is not a vase to be filled, but a fire to be lit from the very beginning. To educate in this way is to complete the work of God: it is to cultivate a child of God."

Let us conclude with this final thought:

"The home, like the Church, has Jesus at its center. The greatest saints are a married couple: Mary and Joseph. Why? Because they kept Jesus—body, blood, soul, divinity—in the center of their home."

Experiences from around the world were shared which reflected the efforts of families to educate in the light of the Gospel in the various situations family life presents.

An education in sharing

Mary: We have ten children who range in age from a one-year-old baby to a university student of eighteen.

Our large home is flooded with all kinds of interests, all kinds of problems, and all kinds of special needs that continually challenge the way Tom and I live with our children, especially in our effort to build our family more and more into a "community of persons."

To be a family whose members are in communion with each other is not something that just happens, nor can it be achieved once and for all. In fact, these thirteen years that we tried to live the spirituality of the Movement, have been a kind of school, a time for us to learn how to become gifts for one another. Often we find ourselves making the same old mistakes, looking too much at ourselves instead of considering the others, but we know that we can always start all over again. In this process of starting again, we experience a new strength, a greater awareness of the needs of the others. Really, almost without realizing it, we educate one another.

By plunging ourselves into the dynamics of offering ourselves as gifts to one another, we create relationships that grow with the events of everyday life. We allow the others to be themselves, without being confined by pre-conceived rules, or by differences in age or generations, or even by our own need to affirm our position as father and mother. This happens because each of us has made a personal choice of God and thus we all have committed ourselves to a single goal and a common set of values.

Almost every evening we come together to talk about how the day went and share our little successes and failures. Our little four-year-old is always the most eager to share how she finished eating all her vegetables at dinner. Our sixteen-year-old daughter often shares how she chose to stop reading her favorite novel, for example, in order to babysit the younger children so that I could go shopping or do some other needed task. At times the children talk about their own growth, of their struggles to not let their difficulties become a burden for the others. Recently one of our sons explained how sad he felt for not having a deeper relationship with his father. It was a precious moment to build not only a stronger bridge between father and son but a deeper understanding among us all.

Tom and I try to encourage the children to participate in our search for what is right and good in all that happens, and we share with them the sadness of our own mistakes as well as the joy of seeing some good results.

As often as we can, we have recreation together, sometimes watching television if the program is really worthwhile, sometimes entertaining each other with simple games that even the younger children can play.

As a mother I feel that my role is to be present in the family, to observe what the children are going through and to spot their problems, whether the children tell me about them or not.

Tom and I try to maintain mutual love between us and to be fully open to the needs of the children in order to help them understand what is best for them. Although we would prefer that our children take the initiative and confide in us, sometimes we have to take the risk and ask them outright what is going on.

This is a delicate thing especially during the period of adolescence. Not long ago I felt the need to speak to one of our sons to let him know that we noticed he was going through some difficulty and that since we loved him very much we wanted to assure him of our support.

Having someone reach out to him like that helped him tremendously. I noticed such a difference afterwards: he made the effort to come out of himself and communicate more with us.

Tom: We try to introduce our little children to the economy of the family and when they reach adolescence they begin to understand how our budget works. The children know that their father has only a moderate income. They also learn rather early that our family believes in the Providence of God for many of our needs, and they witness for themselves the many things that are given us, often precisely when we need them and often in such abundance that we can share with many others.

Our family, like other American families, has to struggle against the almost overwhelming consumerism of our society. Although we try to encourage our children to share their belongings, they sometimes reflect the possessive tendencies of our culture by collecting books, toys, and other things. Sometimes, however, they surprise us with their generosity too. For example, when one of our sons received money for his First Communion, rather than spend it for himself, he took all his brothers and sisters to the store and let each one choose something for himself. The joy of all was great and our other children in subsequent years followed his example so that this has become a family tradition. ►

Recently our seven-year-old son had a birthday party at which he received many presents from his schoolmates. Since he had so many gifts, we suggested that he might like to give the money we would spend on another gift to the hungry children of India, a project for which the youth of the Focolare were working. He said "Yes!" right away.

When working with children, it is hard for a parent to let them make their own mistakes. I remember that when my older son and I were making a go-cart for the younger children, I wanted to make it a certain way and he wanted to do it another way. I let him have his way. Even though it didn't turn out as well as I had hoped, the fact that I left him free was a great encouragement for him.

Last summer, my two teenage sons and I painted the outside of the house. One of the conditions the boys laid down, in a kind of joking way, was that they couldn't work unless they listened to rock music. At first I felt that I couldn't possibly agree to that, I found their music intolerable. But then I thought to myself, "I have to try to make myself one with them." So I said, "All right, let's listen to rock music."

They chose a tape they thought would be more to my taste, and put the speaker out on the window sill near our ladders. After a few hours of listening to the music and their comments on the lyrics and the musicians, I began to see why they liked it and started to like it myself. My sons were very happy with the thought that they had converted their "old man." The younger son felt that while I was teaching them how to paint, he and his brother were teaching me about music. Working together made us all very happy.

After many years in which Mary dedicated herself completely to the care of the family, this year we decided that she could attend college full time. Thus, I teach only at night so that I can be free during the day to take care of our baby and four-year-old. When we started this new schedule, I found it hard to imagine how I could spend the day feeding, changing, and carrying a baby and a toddler around, rather than attending scholarly lectures and studying Dante and Shakespeare. But the more I tried to do these jobs well, the more they became meaningful and beautiful.

One morning after changing Mark's diaper for the third time, I held him in my arms and he looked at me. The light that shone from his eyes, so pure and limpid, made me realize how marvelously true are the words of Jesus: "Whatever you do to the least ... you do to me."

Whatever we do out of love makes the act have great value, even lasting value. I guess I always believed this theoretically, but I don't think I ever really experienced it as much as at that moment.

Mary and Tom Hartmann
Brooklyn, New York

Our children, a novelty for us

After four years of marriage we already had three children. The pace of everyday life was such that we hardly had time to discuss how we were educating our children. It was clear that we were all being educated by life: the little ones and ourselves, and this meant groping together.

We held on to a few basic points: the desire to take the initiative in loving, to recognize Jesus beneath the familiar faces of the family and in certain demanding attitudes, and to begin again after every failure.

Another point was that we never had pre-conceived ideas of how each child should be as they were growing up. From their different personalities we understood only that there were no two alike.

The children's adolescence arrived in all its crudeness. Just when we thought that the worst was over we went through a time when nothing seemed to work any longer. Everything was up for discussion: clothes, friends, vacations, even the Focolare Movement to which we were connected.

Eleanor and Tony Shepherd from Australia shared their experience.

Every time one of the children walked in the door, he or she brought into the house new and unthought of ideas. Since their temperaments were so different, these novelties they came up with were likewise communicated in different ways.

At that time of our lives, not only were the children a novelty for us, but we were also for them. We often clashed with one another as strangers, so different did our intentions appear to be.

Our family life seemed to be an alternation of failures, thoughtfulness and anguish, the search for balance and at different times, attempts on the part of one or the other to reestablish a relationship of love.

Taking a closer look at one another, we learned to acknowledge our personal shortcomings and to accept those of the others. This helped us to have mercy on one another: an aspect of God which, if it enters our relationships, has an enormous potential for peace among us. Thus the differences that emerge in life can become the means for filling in the gaps beyond the clashes and divisions.

We experienced that the fact that we share these educative ideas with other families has often helped to resolve problems among us. For example, offering hospitality to someone in difficulty even perhaps in the middle of an "allergy attack" to the family on the part of one of our children was a risk and could have been an additional source of tension. Instead we discovered unthought of results: a stronger friendship among the children, a mending of relationships, renewed interest in the family.

Anna and Giuseppe Marvelli
from Milan

Still happy

We have six children and we have always tried to raise them according to the values we considered important. However, I tended to impose these values on the children in a manner that bordered on authoritarianism. This attitude was probably what provoked rebellion in our oldest children and a rejection of these values.

We have learned that we must try with all our strength to see things from the children's point of view in order to find the way to communicate with each of them. This has meant that we must often die to ourselves, to our ideas. From this death, however, many beautiful things resulted in our relationships to them.

Our eldest son one day decided to leave home and live with his girlfriend. A few months later they came to tell us that she was pregnant and they hadn't as yet decided if they wanted to marry.

It was a tremendous shock for us. Since they had rejected the values we had tried to communicate, we felt they had rejected us as well.

We accepted this suffering and decided that the only thing that mattered was to intensify our love for them. It was very tough. Many times we had to overcome ourselves in order to refrain from saying anything that could be construed as a judgment. We wanted them to feel completely loved and accepted.

At the same time however we asked them to sleep in separate rooms when they came to visit and in so doing we made it clear to our younger children ►

that we did not approve of their behavior but we still loved and accepted them. Their rejection of our values had not diminished our love for them. On the contrary it was a period in which my wife and I grew in our understanding of what unconditional love is.

A beautiful baby boy was born and after a few months they began to say they wanted to have him baptized. The mother became interested in the Catholic Church and without telling us she began taking instructions in Catholicism. One day she told me that she was surprised to find that we were still happy after six children and twenty-five years of marriage. Gradually she came to understand that God was the basis of our marriage and she told us that this was what led to her interest in the Catholic faith.

Months later they came to tell us that they had decided to marry. It was a very beautiful wedding and many of their young friends who attended were impressed. Several of them, couples, who had been living together, even decided to marry.

Eleanor and Tony Shepherd
Australia

Education and respect for life

Our fourth child was entrusted to us by the court of minors. Due to a traumatic childhood, she had not developed either in self-respect or in caring for her own health. She bore the burden of a total refusal of suffering and illness, the consequence of an accident which she herself provoked. This accident left scars on her body, which she hid from everyone as something to be ashamed of.

Love and dialogue became the basis for the recovery of her entire person. For me, for Franco, and for all the children, she was beautiful and spontaneously we taught her to see herself with the eyes of love and tried to help her discover and appreciate the many talents and gifts she had.

Little by little, with difficulty but with progress, she was able to accept herself. We saw her grow in love for life.

Gradually it became possible to talk to her about the value of suffering. One day she told us: "Today a girl saw my scars and she was horrified and said, 'How ugly! What happened to your arms?' There and then I wanted to run away. Instead, I stopped and calmly talked to her about it. She changed her attitude right away. She asked me to forgive her, and now we are friends."

Anna and Francesco Pizzorno
Genoa, Italy

Education in relationships: a single parent

I think I began to fulfill my educative role as mother to five children when I discovered God as Love. My husband and I took our first steps together in this new way of living and we saw our relationships change moment by moment. In God who is Love we found the wellspring of a deep and renewed love for each other which was reflected and poured out onto our children.

Not long after, however, the life of our family changed dramatically. The children were still young (between two and thirteen years of age) when my husband drowned before our eyes in a boating accident.

I felt lost. I instinctively turned to Jesus and renewed my choice of God. It came naturally to me to talk to the children about heaven. It was a powerful experience: an invisible but very real bond linked heaven to earth. In tears we prayed for him and for us, conscious of the fact that he now lived beside Jesus and yet would remain present in our lives.

A new experience began for our family. The pain was great; we missed him terribly but faith in the love of God gave us strength and consolation.

The children felt loved and discovered in turn the joy of loving. In this way, they also participated more and more in the adventure of believing in the love of God, of taking the initiative in loving, of asking

Maria do Carmo: a widow and mother of five from Brazil.

forgiveness, of sharing their belongings.

It seems that they learned almost naturally to love God, to recognize his presence in his Word, in every neighbor. I can recall many of the conversations with one child or another in which they shared their deepest thoughts or wanted to clarify doubts they had. These conversations continued through adolescence and adulthood, marking the different stages in the lives of each of them, their searching, their choices.

The attitude of respect for their ideas and understanding of them proved to be very important in the choices they made for their lives. They are all adults now but I feel that my function as mother is not over. Perhaps more than ever they need someone who can participate in their plans and projects, difficulties and victories, and together with them can continue to discover the personal love of God in every circumstance and help them respond with generosity.

Maria do Carmo Gaspar
San Paolo, Brazil

Annamaria and Danilo Zanzucchi who are responsible for the New Family Movement, concluded the program.

In these two days possible guidelines of an educational program have emerged which point to the future with hope because they are understood in a vaster framework, that of a civilization of love.

One may think we are being excessively optimistic. It is true that, at times, an abyss exists between the luminous project just presented and what we experience everyday. It is true that we continually struggle with our shortcomings and those of others: with failures, impossible situations, mistaken choices, and events which are at times devastating. The experience of powerlessness in the face of suffering is part of a family's daily life. Pope John XXIII often recalled a proverb that says: "There is a cross behind the door of every house."

Yet we can build a bridge over this abyss. Jesus is again our Teacher. He also experienced great, in fact, the most terrible suffering, when he underwent the mysterious trial of feeling abandoned by the Father. He appeared as an image of complete human failure. In that very moment Jesus filled the abyss and, in a certain way, took upon himself all that is negative in human experience, including the educative experience. This is the greatest gift that the spirituality of the Movement can give to us parents.

We are not speaking here of loving suffering as much as loving Him who suffers. We cannot love the error, but the person who errs, yes. In powerlessness, in failure, in darkness it is a matter of loving the persons who in that darkness live with us.

This is courageous and freely given love, which sees in every suffering the countenance of the "Man of suffering," the narrow door that can lead us slowly beyond many impossible situations, that can mend bro- ►

Anna Maria and Danilo Zanzucchi, married focolarini and directors of the New Family Movement, concluded the two day program.

ken relationships, that can change hearts.

When suffering is loved, as for a wonder—working alchemy like a decomposed seed, gives life to a new reality. It is a truth which escapes the laws of logic and research; but is understood through life!

We have been together for two days. We may ask ourselves now what we should do next? It seems that an invitation for change has been offered to each one of us: to every individual, couple, and family.

We are being asked to change also because we are part of a society which is rapidly changing. We stand before a future of unknown elements.

The phrase "to love one's children" has become clearer to us. In her opening address Chiara Lubich pointed out an original and incomparable prototype of the educator in the person of Jesus. We would like to summarize for you here the features of this splendid image.

Educators are those who serve out of love and are the first to live what they believe in with total commitment:

they concretely help their children. They have faith and affirm the positive inner qualities of the child;

they respect the freedom of the child not imposing anything but giving with the attitude of offering;

they do not hesitate to correct, do not fear the truth, but admonish with peace, calm and detachment;

their mercy covers over everything; it forgets the past, modeling itself on God's boundless mercy;

they educate always, in whatever place or circumstance, using the language of love which is always new and vital.

They are always open to dialogue, to new ideas, to the signs of the times;

they know how to go "against the current," with the authority that comes with the task entrusted to them;

they try to be another Jesus, to the point of being able to repeat to the child, as if it were their own commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you."

It is certainly an ideal which would be difficult if not impossible to achieve were it not for the power of God's presence among persons who love one another. Our part is to continually verify our relationships in the light of faith.

This requires that we are genuinely open and generous toward all the members of the family. It is a dynamic reality, ever new, that doesn't have rigid patterns, and is continually re-built each day, like blood that circulates and continually renews the body.

If we are like this, everything that we give (food, care, affection) will be a transmission of human and divine life, at every age and in every moment. It is the mystery of the love of God which continues: "I in you and you in me."

We may not yet see the results. We may never see them in this life, just like a seed which dies does not see the ear of grain. We know, however, that every suffering has its fruit, even if at times it will be in other families or in other countries.

This reality builds a new society.

Annamaria and Danilo Zanzucchi

LOVE IS STRONGER

by Matteo Silvan

A new life

Part V

Lazarus Come Out, *a book published by New City Press is the autobiography of Matteo Silvan.*

Love is Stronger *starts where the other ended, with the death of his wife Teresa and with the beginning of a new chapter in his life. In the last installment, Matteo recounts his dramatic spiritual journey. At fifty years of age, a family man at the peak of his career in government service, he nevertheless experienced a void in his life. One day he stopped to talk to two young women from the Focolare who came to visit his daughter. From here his journey took a decisive turn. In the Mariapolis he went into a crisis: he was too busy for God and yet His call was irresistable. We resume our story now after Matteo has given his "yes" to God and continues his quest to know God's love.*

What a good husband!

After a brief period of euphoria, though, a strange restlessness came over me. The years were passing and I felt an always greater need to grasp the meaning of the mystery that—for a moment—had been revealed to me. I was seeking more light in the light ... I was groping.

Let me explain. I knew that living the Gospel implied also accepting the cross. I knew as well that after one's first "yes" there would be many others to say, perhaps painful ones. But the crosses that I had were negligible in comparison to the extraordinary gifts that God was sending me.

One of the crosses came from the fact that in the beginning my wife and daughters could not understand the change in me and were in great anguish. "The sword" seemed to divide my family. To some degree this may have been due also to the fact that at that time the Focolare Movement had not as yet been formally approved by the Holy See.

For four long years, therefore, I walked alone as if in a desert until an unforseen event took place. All during this time I had been attending daily Mass but concealed the fact from my wife. I did not want to upset her anymore than I had to. I had been getting up earlier each morning but I let her think I was taking walks ... to keep fit.

In the meantime, as the director of the Government Loan Office I had financed the building of a ship. I was invited along with my wife to the reception held on the occasion of its launching. This is where the unforseen event came in.

There we were with our glasses raised for the toast when the priest who saw me at Mass each day came by to greet me. I could not not introduce him to my wife. He turned to her with a big smile and exclaimed: "I'm very happy to meet you! What a good husband you have who goes to Mass every morning."

You cannot imagine the expression on my wife's face! She certainly did not expect this. She looked me directly in the eyes, understood, and then making the best of a bad joke, managed to smile. My dear Teresa!

From this point on everything changed. Now I had to play cards with an open hand but this also made it possible for the whole family to be touched by grace. In 1959 my wife decided to come and see for herself what a Mariapolis was. She became so enthusiastic about it that she invited our daughter Lucia to come and join her. Lucia, in turn, was so struck that she felt "called" to leave everything and after only a few months entered the focolare.

God's love was overwhelming and I felt I had not done anything to merit such predilection. It was at this point that a sort of restlessness took hold of me. ►

The trial

Everytime I read the episode of the resurrection of Lazzarus in the Gospel I felt that Jesus was speaking also to me as when he was saying: "Lazzarus, come forth!" I did not have the courage, though, to free myself, once and for all, from the ties that bound me to the world.

During Mass one day I felt again as directed to me the words, "Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Urged then by something in me which certainly was not human I cried out, "Lord, do with me what you will. I offer you everything, even my eyes...."

Gripped in anguish, I felt as if my prayer had reached God.

For many months I continued to offer myself to God at Mass. When the priest would pronounce the words: "This is my body.... This is my blood," I repeated the words with him. It seemed to be Jesus in me to say these words.

Meanwhile my search for God continued. As I have said, I was seeking a closer friendship with him which obviously called for my total purification. Finally the trial by fire arrived.

I had to bring charges against one of my employees for some very serious irregularities. This person defended himself by slanderously reporting against my secretary and I. It was a time of tremendous tension but finally the truth won out. The employee would be severely dealt with. When we heard the news that our names were cleared my secretary and I exulted with joy. After all justice was done. We immediately realized, though, that the punishment would ruin the employee and his family. We could not be happy for that. Even more, we had to return good for evil.

I suggested to my secretary (who had ideals similar to my own) to pray for the guilty party. She agreed and we prayed together that he not be treated harshly. Suddenly I again felt that deep longing for total self-giving that I had experienced before. I told my secretary and as a result we ended our prayer like this: "And if someone must pay for the evil done, let it be us to pay for him."

A week had passed when I suddenly realized that I could hardly see from my left eye. It was as if a big black spot covered it. I ran to the doctor who immediately diagnosed the problem as a detached retina.

"I have gained the absolute certainty that God is Love even when he makes me cry."

There I was shortly afterwards laid up in a hospital bed with both eyes blind-folded and with orders not to move my head. My family was away from Rome, and I was alone. Anguish overtook me when I realized I might not see again.

Two days later a colleague from the office came to visit and told me that my secretary was also hospitalized with a malignant tumor....

Incredible! Jesus had heard us and answered immediately. He was treating us as real friends!

"My God, my God," I cried out within me. And immediately as if he had answered me I felt his presence near me. He seemed to console me and lovingly repeat to me: "Here I am! Were you looking for me? We can finally be together: I with you, and you with me!"

It is impossible to put into words what you experience in moments such as these. Solitude with God is bliss.

Infinitely free!

From this time on, a marvelous, secret dialogue began between myself and Jesus. I loved him by accepting my suffering with joy. He loved me by remaining near me day and night. This gave me the strength to smile always to the surprise of the people who came to see me. My serenity bewildered everyone. I felt I was living an extraordinary experience. I was blind-folded, in total darkness, but with the eyes of my soul I could see: and it was all light.

After five months I left the hospital. I had lost my sight in one eye but I could still see with the other. My secretary had a similar experience. She left the hospital impaired but the tumor never recurred and many years have passed since then.

Someone might be scandalized to read that I repeatedly asked to be tested by suffering. Many will say that I should never have done it. In fact,

Scripture says, "To each day, each day's troubles are enough." But at that time I had no knowledge of asceticism. I was already up in years and before dying I wanted to at least touch the hem of Jesus' garment as had the lady suffering from hemorrhages in Scripture (Mk 5:25). She however wanted only to be physically healed, I instead wanted to be renewed in spirit. I had hoped that Jesus would at least turn around and see that among those following him there was also me.

I do not know if I would do now what I did then. The season of my life is a different one. On the other hand, I have come to understand that for those of us who aim in a specific way at unity, denying ourselves in order to love our neighbor ought to be our daily bread. Those are the crosses we are called to nail ourselves to; they are crosses that flow directly from the practice of the new commandment: "Love one another *as* I have loved you."

At any rate, I don't regret what I did. In the end, what is preferable: to live a grey, inconclusive life with two eyes, or with one eye to walk out into the open, into the bright sunlight?

Now I have gained the absolute certainty that God is Love, even when he makes us cry. I feel that he carries me in the palm of his hand and makes use of me for his plans. In the end I feel infinitely free, free even from the fear of death.

Death ...

At this point my story continued for my friends in New York to the purpose of telling about Teresa's departure which I have already shared in the preceding pages of this book. I will pick up the conversation now where I had left off. Life continues.

At the 1981 Mariapolis in New York, Matteo Silvan recounted his life experience.

A new life

Like a child in kindergarten

This morning, ten days after the departure of Teresa, I knocked at the door of a focolare. I was not alone. Lucia, Chiaretta, and my grandson Francesco were with me.

Lucia spoke to the person responsible for the focolare as a mother would when she accompanies a child to kindergarten for the first time. And the child was me.

She told him that I am a person "pure of heart" (very kind of her) and that they should have special consideration for me. Then she added something else I couldn't make out because they were in another part of the room.

We had lunch all together. Then my relatives left and I behaved, that is, I didn't start crying like children often do when they see their mother go, leaving them alone in the kindergarten.

Right then and there, however, I had my first talk with Gianni, who had the responsibility for this community. In reality he was like the center of unity for the members of the "family." He immediately took notice of my state of exhaustion and suggested that I not plunge head on into the intense life of the community. "Feel free," he concluded, "and just do what you can do. If I see the need for some changes, I'll let you know."

I realized that this was a temporary situation inspired by the consideration of the difficult moment I was going through. I felt, in fact, like a person who has forgotten the past and yet knows nothing of the future. If I looked inside, I felt like someone who had been uprooted from the world. The impression was that of someone who is coming to life, to a new life, protected by the love of his brothers who help him come out of himself like a butterfly from the cocoon.

At the dinner table I felt that the bond of friendship among ►

us was strengthened like the knots of a net. I was joining a community of five and I, logically, was the oldest. I felt, however, as if we were all the same age, probably because we all had the same goal. When the goal is reached, I guess, the worker of the last hour will have the same reward, and this is what you call mercy.

After dinner I went out for a walk . I wanted to be alone and try to see where I was at. I breathed freely, filling my lungs with the fresh evening air. There was still light in the sky and all the objects around me stood out sharply in this special hour of the day. I had the impression that I was discovering what appeared before my eyes as if I saw everything for the first time. As I walked I was astonished at feeling so alive and free, and I rejoiced because of it, as a child would. The past was really gone. The future I did not have. "The present moment is everything," I thought. And I wanted it to be an everything filled with God.

The room I was given was furnished with red and yellow furniture. It was the only room available in the house and it did look like a child's room. I wondered where the furniture could have come from. My window overlooked a courtyard. No panorama to admire, therefore, but a great silence to enjoy.

Before going to bed I spent some time in recollection. Immediately I felt deeply moved inside and my prayer was gentle and yet filled with gratitude as was my heart. "Lord," I said, "how can I thank you? You took with you the person I most loved on earth; but you are giving her back to me as an angel who, from heaven, looks after me. You have then led me here, to a focolare where I have found a family.... Lord, thank you for the pain; thank you for the love...."

"As I left the house I was almost blinded by the splendor of the early morning sun."

"Let him who is thirsty come forward"

I spent a peaceful night. It was time to go back to work now after twelve days of absence. Ever since I had retired, in fact, I began to do volunteer work as a collaborator of Father Werenfried von Straaten, the "beggar of God," and founder of the international relief organization, "Aid to the Church in Need." I learned a lot from him even if at times I struggled in the encounter with such a strong personality. The fact is that every charism is personal, even if it is destined to the good of a community. People like this cannot be measured by the usual standards or one could be easily in the wrong. I know, however, how much the Church and the entire western world owes to him. I myself owe him very much.

So it was time to start work again. I was happy to go back to my colleagues and be able to talk to the many benefactors linked to the office, many wonderful people.

As I left the house I was almost blinded by the splendor of the early morning sun. I began to walk at a brisk pace in order to get to St. Peter's Square. I had never crossed it this early in the day and I didn't expect the sight that met my eyes.

St. Peter's Square as I saw it was still enveloped in shade while the facade of the basilica was totally illuminated by the sun. It looked like something set apart, as if it belonged more to heaven than to earth.

I stopped for a moment to look at that beauty and I discovered that I was still capable of wonderment. "It is true then that I am still alive," I thought. "It is true that I can, even though I'm seventy-three years old, start all over again to weave together the threads of my life as I begin to walk along a new path. "Yes," I thought, "death is gone, death without the tragedy of death. Love with a capital "L" has consumed the pain. This is the answer."

I must confess that perhaps I have been particularly blessed. There are in fact cases of violent death, of excruciating agonies that leave deep wounds

in those who survive. I understand how people can mourn for a life time. What I am sharing here, however, is just my story, the story of someone who has found a way to grow older with dignity.

I'm sure there are other ways. If someone is already tired of living, and doesn't look for "a way" to lead him or her further ahead spiritually, if someone is only looking for a place where to die in peace, to this someone I have nothing to say. Holy is the desire for peace, and holy are those who, with love, assist people who find themselves in that situation. Many, however, have an always greater thirst for that water that Jesus in the Book of Revelation offers: "Let him who is thirsty come forward; let all who desire it accept the gift of life-giving water"(Rv 22:17).

I have been among those who are thirsty and this makes my story exceptional in itself. It could be, though, the story of many, of all those who, overcoming the traditional concept of old age, approached that fountain and drank of that water. From that moment on, they also would experience the beginning of a new life, a life with light and darkness, with victories and failures. for them too, however, as it always happened to me, just one word would be enough to overcome every difficult situation: forget the past and start again.

Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians, "Brothers, I do not think of myself as having reached the finish line. I give no thought to what lies behind but push on to what is ahead" (Phil 3:13).

Coming to life for the third time

I was well acquainted with the life in the focolare. I had been attending meetings there for almost twenty years. Now, however, I felt I should know more about it from within because experience told me that to live together is not always easy even when people are committed to living the Gospel. It is not easy especially when in the group there are people of different backgrounds, coming from different cultures and of different ages.

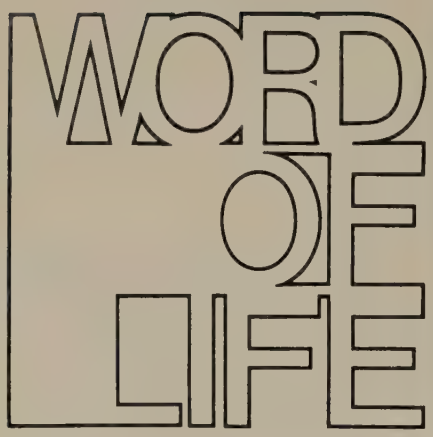
"All I will have to do is abandon myself as a child into the arms of the one who called me to this life."

So I asked Gianni to tell me a little about the life of the focolare, and he explained. "The focolare? As you know the focolare is a house like any other and yet we would like it to be similar as much as possible to the house of Nazareth. Life in the focolare is possible, in fact, if in the midst of those who live there, Love lives, and this for us is Jesus. Without Jesus present in our midst there is no focolare. We could all just as well go home. There are other places in the world where, one can live his life peacefully, with its moments of light and darkness. Fear gripped my soul for a moment. Wasn't he looking at me straight in my eyes when he said "We could all just as well go home?" Gianni continued however: "Don't worry, I'm sure you will make it. 'Focolare' after all is a word which comes from 'fire'. To build a fire you need pieces of wood. We are the wood, and when you want to start a strong fire, it is not enough just to put the logs in a heap. They must be crossed...." I understood.

"Naturally," Gianni continued, "if a piece of wood is just too big or too contorted, it will have to be cut vertically to prepare it for the fire." I couldn't help but burst into laughter. "You're saying this for me," I said. "You'll never find another log harder or more contorted than me." He laughed, too, but he wouldn't let me get away with it. "We are all here because of God's infinite mercy. On the other hand if you want a fire the wood is necessary, and you have this advantage over us: that are a better-seasoned piece of wood, and perhaps you won't make that much smoke with your fire."

I felt better, but I had a few more questions which I proceeded to ask: "I know very well that there is a basic law in the focolare—we need to die to ourselves every day to come to life again every day. Do you

(Continued on page 28)



AUGUST

"I am sure that neither death, nor life ... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

"I am sure that neither death, nor life ... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The love of God in Christ Jesus that St. Paul speaks of here is the infinitely merciful love of a Father who has tried in every possible way, even the most inconceivable, to come to the aid of our weakness. It is the love that God manifested to us through the death and Resurrection of his Son. In sending us Jesus, the Father gave us his most precious possession: his own Son. He could not have done more. In the face of so much love we can no longer doubt: God is completely on our side, he will never abandon us.

"I am sure that neither death, nor life ... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

If God loves us so much we can be certain that nothing can take this love away from us: neither life with all its trials, nor death with its mysterious elements, nor any dark moment in history.

Providing we correspond, nothing can stand in the way of the salvation that the love of God obtained for us and our complete fulfillment in Christ.

Not only. We must be certain that his love is hidden behind every event and the most adverse situations. He uses everything in order to fulfill his plan on us.

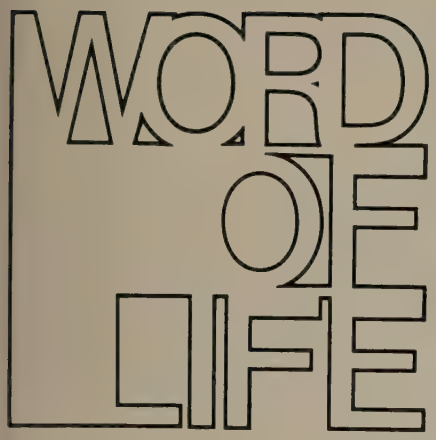
"I am sure that neither death, nor life ... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This certainty ought to be the foundation of our whole life. Even if everything were to fall apart we should be certain that God is always near us with his love as he was to his Son Jesus both in life and in death. We should be certain that the love of God unfailingly leads to the Resurrection.

"I am sure that neither death, nor life ... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

How then should we live this Word of life?
Certainly we believe—or at least we say we want to believe—in the love of God. We must admit, however, that oftentimes our faith is not as courageous as it should be. We give evidence of this by how we act in times of trial, illness or temptation. At these times we easily let ourselves be beset by the doubt: "Is it really true that God loves me?" Instead we must not doubt. We should trustingly abandon ourselves, without reservation, to the love of the Father. We must overcome the darkness and emptiness that we may feel by embracing the cross well and then go ahead loving God by doing his will and loving our neighbor. If we do this we will experience with Jesus the power and the joy of the Resurrection. We will experience for ourselves how true it is that for those who believe and abandon themselves to his love, everything is transformed: the negative becomes positive, death becomes a wellspring of life and from out of the darkness a marvelous light breaks through.

Chiara Lubich



SEPTEMBER

"Both in life
and in death
we are the Lord's"

(Romans 14:8)

"Both in life and in death, we are the Lord's."

Episodes of misunderstanding and intollerance occurring in the community of Rome provided St. Paul with the opportunity to recall a principle that embraces all of Christian life. It is a truth that at first sight seems obvious, but which is of fundamental importance for its practical consequences.

We belong to God, and for a very simple reason: God is our Creator and Savior. He created us and gave us his Son so that we might participate in his life and in his joy, first of all here on earth, and then fully, after death. Jesus died and rose precisely so that we would belong to him and through him, to the Father.

"Both in life and in death we are the Lord's."

We belong to the Lord. Cosequently our whole life and all our activities, should express the fact that we are his, that we strive toward belonging to him totally.

We can achieve this by making every effort trying to do his will wherever we are, in the place he called us to be: in the family, in a factory, in the office, in school, in a hospital, in government, and so on. Further still, we can demonstrate that we are his by striving to do his will in the different trials of life that God permits in order to purify us and enable us to cooperate with Jesus in the sanctification of the world.

"Both in life and in death we are the Lord's."

Naturally what counts for our life, counts even more for our death. Our full and final belonging to the Lord will depend, in fact, on the moment of death.

How should we live that moment? By responding to the call of God and trustingly abandoning ourselves to his mercy in the hope of meeting him in eternal life.

Death, in itself, would be bitter and unsettling; instead everything changes if it is lived in the Lord and for the Lord.

"Both in life and in death we are the Lord's."

To live this Word of life well this month let us repeat to the Lord: "I am yours." It could be a sincere expression of love that cannot be other than pleasing to him. And then, since in order to belong to the Lord we should do his will, let us try to do it with all our heart.

The will of God certainly has, as we know, an immense range of applications.

Let us then, during this month, try to concentrate at least on the commandment dearest to Jesus' heart: love of neighbor. We will consequently take greater care of the sick and the elderly; we will try to meet the different needs of those who live with us; to concern ourselves with the education of our children, with the good example we should give, (particularly to the little ones), with our duty to avoid everything that could scandalize them or harm their spiritual life.

Furthermore, we can consider the respect we owe to our neighbor's ideas, mentality and good reputation especially, and avoid the idle gossip that could damage it. And why not give greater attention to the way we drive and show greater respect for our environment? This, too, is a concrete and effective way of bearing witness to the fact that our lives—as well as our neighbor's—do not belong to us but to the Lord.

Chiara Lubich

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers shared with us.

A frazzled college student?

Last fall I left my family and friends in California to go to college in Washington, D.C. Especially at first, many of my classmates were pretty wild, being away from home, parents, and restrictions for the first time. Surrounded by these values and attitudes, I really began to understand what it means to go against the current of the world.

One night I was in my dorm studying and I heard parties going on all around me. I was overcome by loneliness and isolation. Then I remembered Jesus Forsaken, alone and isolated. My friends, family and the comfortable security of home were 3,000 miles away, but I felt a deep peace in loving Jesus Forsaken in my loneliness, and felt all of this was God's love for me.

Being on my own, I have made many mistakes as I try to get my act together: to learn how to plan my time, how to study well. At one point I felt like I couldn't do anything right. I woke up at 9:00 a.m. one morning after sleeping through my 8:15 class, and began kicking myself for being unorganized, irresponsible, and so on. Then I remembered the Word of life, "There is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentent sinner" (Luke 15:10). I realized that I could always start again.

I was also struck with how much God loves me, a frazzled college student, and this gave me the energy to go ahead. All I had to do was live the present moment. My mistakes were in the past and future deadlines were in the future. The hundredfold was a new sense of why I was in school: not to get good grades, not to "experience the east coast," not even to get a degree, but only to love, to live my life in response to God's immense love for me.

This led to many concrete experiences. I realized I had to start with the person closest to me. My nearest neighbor was my roommate. Right away we knew our interests were very different. To really love her, I knew I had to make myself one, and begin with concrete acts of love. Often this meant sharing laundry detergent, listening to her music or just putting my books down to listen.

One night she was having a lot of trouble with an English paper. I was busy writing my own paper and really wanted to finish, but then I remembered the Word of life, "Let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light" (Rm 15:7). Having an armor of light meant in that moment to forget my own paper in order to love her. So we sat together and worked on an outline, organizing the paper. Then I tried to proof read the drafts really out of love, so that she would feel we were working on it together and not that I was correcting her. Finally, I went to bed while she finished up.

Very early in the morning I woke up to the sound of the typewriter and at first was very annoyed that this paper of hers had cost me so much sleep. Then I remembered the Word of life again, and took another step to live it. I pulled out my typewriter and began helping her type to finish the paper on time.

A couple of days later, when I was really tired, she left a note for me on our mirror, encouraging me to go ahead and asking if she could help.

A. U.

A drop in the ocean?

We are a Youth for a United World group and we are trying to give our contribution for the renewal of the world. We believe in working for a united world but sometimes what we do seems like a drop in the ocean. The world looks like it is heading toward an apocalyptic end.

What will the future of humanity be like? Is there hope of changing this consumeristic mentality which is leading to the destruction of nature, the business of selling arms, and a widening of the gap between rich and poor nations?

Young people from Germany

Certainly many of the ills that afflict humanity and lead us to foresee a possibly tragic future depend on the consumeristic mentality which prevails in the society we live in. This mentality can be synthesized by the idea that we want "everything and right away" without reflecting on the consequences of our actions on the very survival of our planet. Since our world today offers us opportunities for a wealthier, easier, and more comfortable life, we take advantage of them all because, after all, it will be others who will pay the consequences, those who come after us.

As a result of this mentality, grave things are already happening which could be irreversible and compromise life on earth. To give an example it is enough to think of the loss to nature that will ultimately affect us all, of the Amazon forest which is being destroyed because of economic interests, of the ramifications of the uncontrolled spreading of the Sahel desert in Africa, of the pollution of our air and water, of the damage to the ozone layer in the atmosphere, and so on. They are all devastating phenomena brought about by mankind.

As I was saying, the consumeristic mentality amounts to a mentality of selfishness because it concerns itself solely with the immediate satisfaction of one's often superfluous needs without considering the needs of others, of humanity in the future, and without respect for nature.

What can we do in the face of all this? Can we change the direction? I think that it certainly is possible. Gandhi gave us an example. One of his important initiatives was that of convincing the Indian people not to buy the clothing sold to ►

them at high prices by the English. England used, in fact, to buy the cotton in India at a very low price. Gandhi wanted to make his people understand that if they wanted to free themselves from the vicious circle of the capitalistic society which was exploiting them, they had to do something, they had to begin themselves.

Now, the circle that exploits us and compromises our future is the mentality of selfishness that is transmitted to us. We need a change of mentality, and we Christians ought to be the champions of this new mentality, translating it into concrete facts, as well. We should be people who don't want everything and right away for ourselves, but rather, people led by love who always have the needs of others in mind and know how to deny themselves for a future good so that others can have the essentials. This should also enable us to discern the steps proposed in this direction by social and political groups: for example, proposals to reduce profits in order to provide jobs for the unemployed, wages that take into account family composition, ecological improvements, and so on. We should support what is good and make it known.

There is a Christian form of protest which is not loud but radical. It can bring about a change of direction as it did in past centuries with other products of selfishness like slavery, for instance. I would say that Christians by nature ought to be optimists, full of hope and trust for the future, because they know that God entered history and it is he who is writing it ... even through our mistakes and our limited contributions.

Giorgio Martelli

(Continued from page 23)

really think I will make it? Will it be possible for me to undergo such a radical change in my life at my age?" Gianni did not hesitate, though: "Everything is possible with God. Didn't you tell me that you had encountered God when you were fifty and you had had the impression that you were being born for the second time? Well, now you are seventy-three. All you have to do is to take a step ahead and repeat the procedure ... just come to life for the third time."

Yes, I knew I was beginning a third stage in my life, the stage when the decline of one's existence begins, slowly and relentlessly. Gianni guessed my thoughts, "I know—he said—that at your age your physical strength will inevitably decline. Yet, you can fill your life with moments where declining is rather a letting go of old ideas in order to acquire new ones, on a spiritual level."

To come to new life.... It's just too beautiful, I thought. And I felt very close to Nicodemus who during the night went to question Jesus. He had seen his miracles but he did not understand very well who he was. Jesus told him, "No one can see the reign of God unless he is begotten from above." Nicodemus was perplexed and asked, "How can a man be born again once he is old? Jesus replied: "I solemnly assure you, no one can enter into God's kingdom without being begotten of water and spirit." And he added, "The wind blows where it will. You hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from, or where it goes" (Jn 3:3-5,8).

If this is so, I thought, why worry? It will be enough to listen to the voice of God within me. It will be feeble at times like a moan rising from my soul. Yet all I will have to do is to abandon myself as a child into the arms of the one who has called me to this life.

(to be continued)

What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

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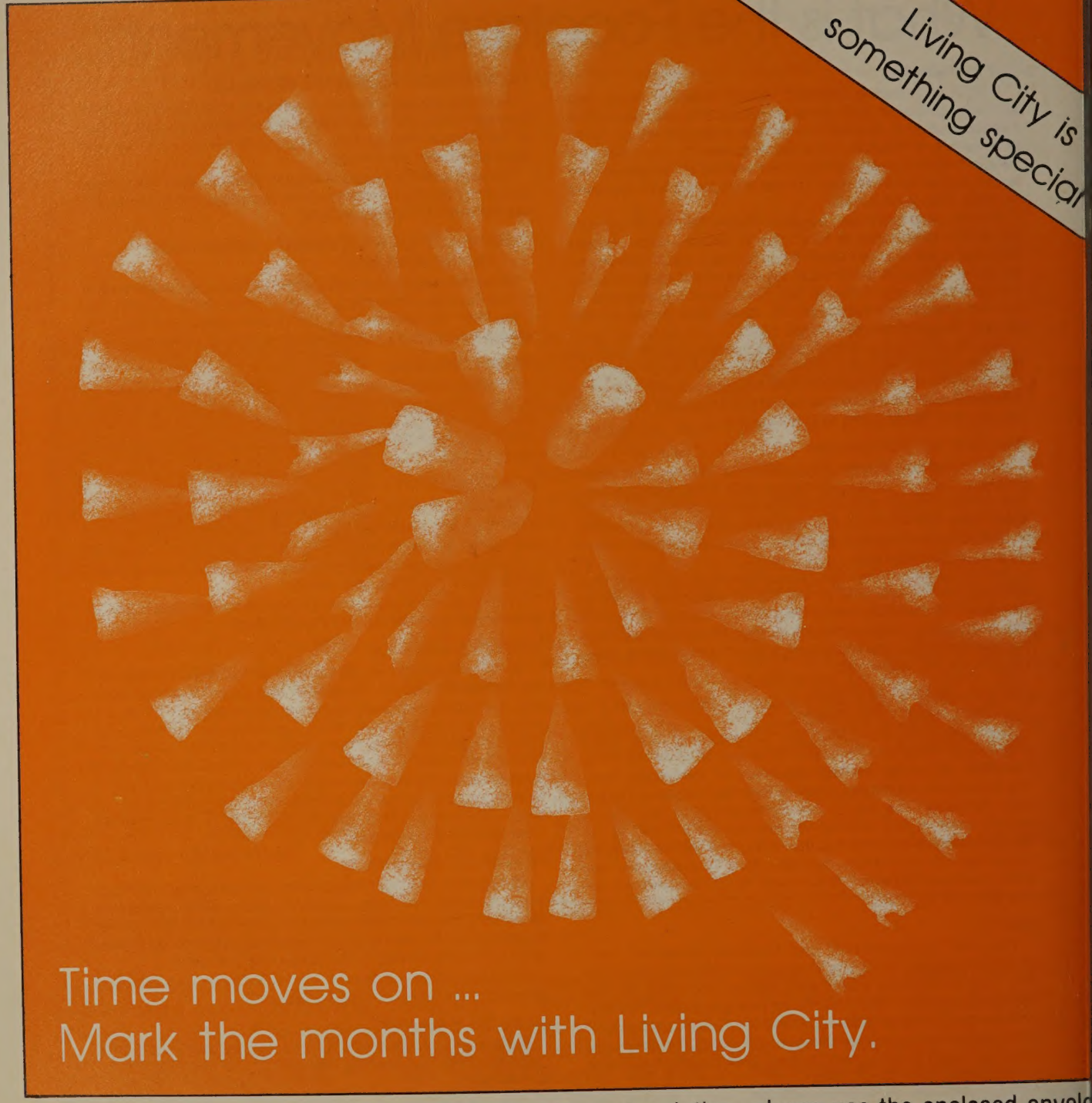

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